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Confessions

OF AN

ENGLISH HACHISH EATER

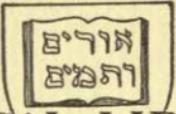


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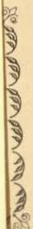
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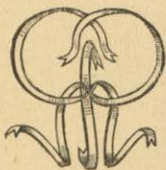


Confessions

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OF AN

ENGLISH HACHISH-EATER



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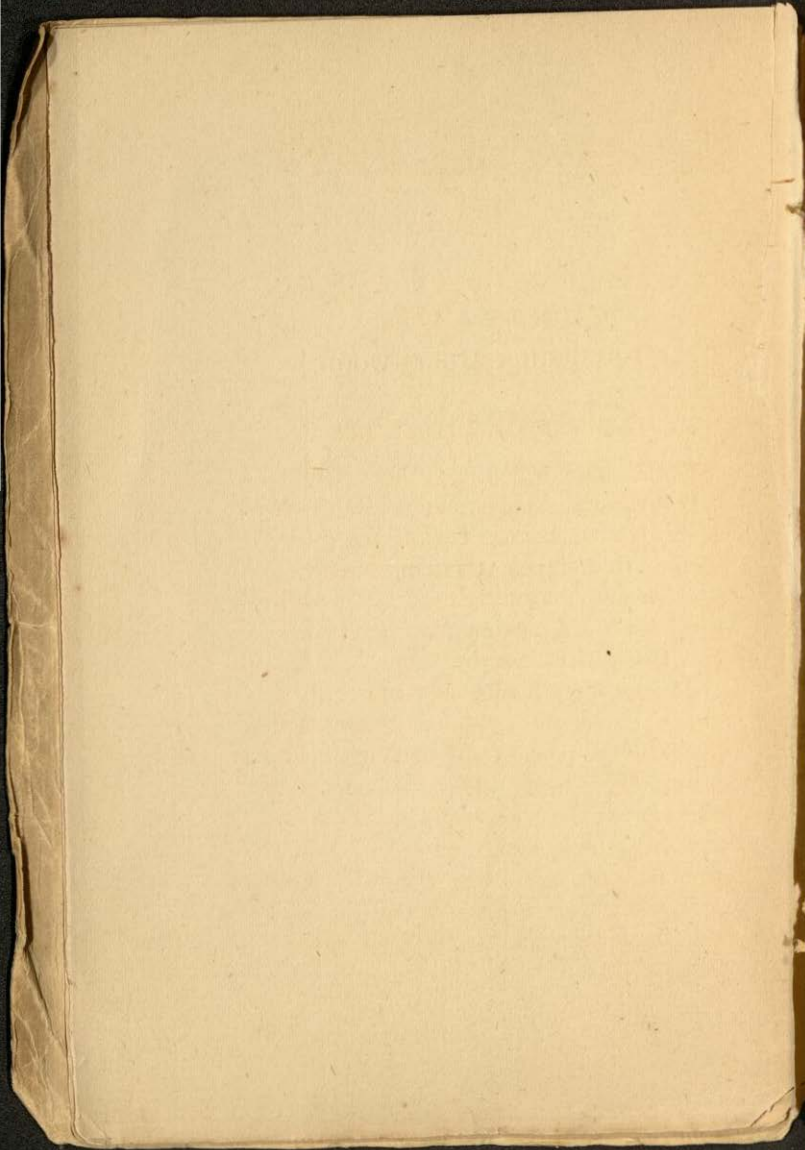
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To
FREDERICK GREENWOOD,
this little Volume
is gratefully Dedicated
by
THE AUTHOR.



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CONFESSIONS OF AN ENGLISH HACHISH EATER.

I. THE FIRST EXPERIMENT.

THE tales which have been told by Alexandre Dumas the Elder, Théophile Gautier, Bayard Taylor, and others, of the extraordinary narcotic properties of hachish and the marvellous effects which it produces, led me some time ago to make experiments with the drug upon myself.

The active principle of hachish is, as most people are doubtless aware, contained in the resin of the common hemp-plant. The hemp grown in temperate climates supplies, however, but little resin; and this little is almost entirely devoid of narcotic properties. Knowing this, I took some pains to assure myself that the dried hemp from which I prepared my hachish

came from India and was of recent growth. Having procured my raw material, I carefully picked out the flowering tops of a number of fine plants, and macerated them in spirit; pressing out, distilling, and evaporating the result to the consistency of bird-lime. I thus obtained a viscous dark-green mass, of a peculiar odour and bitter taste. This resinous extract is the foundation of bang, and is known in different parts of Asia as canop, churrus, chutsao, ganjah, gindshi, hachish, majum, malach, sjarank, and subjah, and in South Africa as dacha.

I dare say that English doctors are for the most part ready to confess that they know very little about the drug. They use it occasionally, perhaps, but they have not learnt to trust it: and why? because the hemp-resin that is commonly obtainable in this country is very bad, or, at least, very variable in quality. The chemists who procure it forget to ask whence it comes, and, when they have once prepared it, either in the form of an extract or as a tincture, they keep it, possibly for years,

upon their shelves, and seem to be meantime oblivious that all the virtues that it ever possessed are evaporating. By a few physicians the *extractum cannabis Indicæ*, of the British Pharmacopœia is prescribed in small doses for certain diseases of women, for rheumatism, and sometimes for one or two other maladies; but I believe I may safely say that in England it is seldom, if indeed ever, used purely as a narcotic. Yet nearly all books on *Materia Medica* agree that it is capable of exerting powerful and astonishing effects in that capacity. The truth is that medical men, unable in this country to procure trustworthy specimens of the drug, have been frightened by the uncertain and varying action of weak or stale samples, and have practically discarded *Cannabis Indica* for opium. So scarce, indeed, is real hachish in Europe that many writers upon the subject have been led to declare that the peculiar effects of the narcotic are only to be witnessed in Oriental countries, the fact being merely that the writers in question have not had opportunities of observing those effects because they have

not been able to provide the exciting cause. They have believed that they have been administering hachish, when they have only been administering so much impotent resin of hemp. I suppose that at no chemist's in London can potent hachish be obtained at this moment. He who wants it pure and good must get it, in one form or another, from the East. Dr. Christison, who once grew some hemp in Edinburgh for experimental purposes, says that his plants produced no appreciable amount of the narcotic principle: and there is no doubt whatever that hachish owes its qualities to the locality and atmospheric conditions of its production. The best in the world comes from Nepaul, Herat, and Persia.

I once, in a letter to the *St. James's Gazette*, gave a brief account of hachish as I had found it: and immediately I was brought to book by a gentleman who wrote as follows to the Editor of that paper:—
“Referring to the letter in your journal of this evening, I would point out that there is a most vivid description of the effects

of the drug in the 'Pillars of Hercules.' I was intimately acquainted with the author, Mr. David Urquhart, and know him to have made repeated efforts to reproduce in England the effects experienced in the East with hachish ; but in vain. He complained that, like the caravan tea of Russia, transport, water-carriage (with no matter what degree of circumspection, what amount of casing and covering) were fatal to the magic influence hachish exercises alike on Westerns and Orientals, when properly taken and of the proper kind. He was assisted in his experiments by the late Major Rolland, who had long Eastern experiences himself, and by several others on different occasions ; but the result was invariably the same : only a kind of abortive opium exaltation being attained—nothing in the least resembling the fantastic De Quincey condition described by your correspondent."

Certainly, as I have already said, there is a difficulty in obtaining potent hachish in England : but that difficulty is not now insuperable, whatever it may have been in

1848, when Mr. David Urquhart's book was published. More than five and thirty years have since then elapsed, and it should be remembered that hemp plants from Persia and other good districts can now reach us almost ere they have had time to fade. Steam and the Suez Canal have made the pleasures of hachish possible even to the dweller in smoky, unromantic London.

The name, hachish, is particularly interesting as having supplied us with the word assassin. Originally, as I suppose everyone knows, an assassin, or as he is still called in Auvergne, an "assashin," simply meant an eater of hachish, and it only came to signify a murderer because hachish was administered by that fanatic brigand, the Old Man of the Mountains, to his followers in order to prime them for the execution of his orders. Doubtless one might do almost anything while under the drug's mysterious influence. It has never, however, incited me to mischief, and certainly not to bloodthirstiness. I have no ill word to speak of it. It has never given me a head-ache, or what the Germans pic-

turesquely call a *Katzenjammer*: it has never upset my appetite or my digestion: and, although I cannot say that it has never temporarily interfered with my clearness of brain, I consider that I have been more than compensated by the delicious dreams which I owe to hachish for the short periods of muddle-headedness that may have resulted from the use of the drug.

I need not give any detailed account of my earliest experiments with the extract which I prepared for myself. Alexandre Dumas, in *Monte Cristo* represents his hero as unconcernedly giving a man half a teaspoonful, or thereabouts, of hachish. Had I taken as much, I fancy that I should have suffered for my rashness. Fortunately for myself, I was cautious, and began by taking a very little. Day by day I increased the quantity, but I experienced no effects, in spite of the fact that Dr. O'Shaughnessy, who introduced the drug into England, declares that in India natives are powerfully influenced by a half-grain dose. Late one afternoon, however, I swallowed six grains, dissolved in a spoonful of brandy. My pulse

at the time was beating steadily at the rate of 62 strokes a minute, and I had eaten nothing for five hours. Half an hour later I dined; and afterwards, foregoing my usual cup of coffee, I settled myself into a comfortable armchair by the fireside and lighted a cigar. I was not drowsy, but felt lazy and disinclined to move; and this tendency was speedily increased by an agreeable sensation of warmth that pervaded my whole body. A friend who was with me informed me, however, that my actual temperature was normal, and that my pulse was but very slightly accelerated. Presently a curious torpor began to take possession of my extremities. My feet and hands successively "went to sleep" for a few moments, and, when they awoke again, tingled as if they had been frost-bitten and were rapidly regaining their natural condition. The frequent recurrence of these sensations concentrated my attention upon myself; and little by little I fell into complete silence, and then lay back in my chair. Although I did not lose consciousness for more than three or four seconds

at a time, consecutive thought now became irksome, if not impossible ; and I involuntarily surrendered myself to the dreaminess that came over me.

The drug was doing its work at last.

It is fabled of Gontram the Good, of Burgundy, that his soul, while he slept, once left his body and penetrated into the bowels of Mont Trésor, where it beheld a magnificent vision of hidden wealth. My mind too seemed to quit my body and travel into a fairyland. It visited the strand of a calm and moonlit sea, in whose waters beautiful women bathed, laughing. Thence it was transported to the sward of a forest glade full of the music of birds that flitted hither and thither. Again, with equal suddenness, it was carried upwards through the crisp air of night to a mountain peak, whence all around was visible in the starlight ; and I felt myself alone in a world of ice-fields and avalanches. But no vision lasted for long. It changed with the rapidity of the pattern in a revolving kaleidoscope ; and so entranced was I by what I seemed to behold, that my friend

had to raise his voice ere he could temporarily arouse me to a sense of reality.

Whenever he shouted into my ear I answered languidly ; but even as I replied —(these details my companion furnishes) —my attention wandered off, and my half-finished sentence ended in irrelevant or incoherent nonsense. I had not the strength of will to tear myself away from my dreaming. And no wonder, seeing what dreams were mine! I seemed to be as much at home in water and air as on the earth.

After flying through space towards a star, and noticing as I approached it its increasing magnitude and brightness, I fell seaward ; and, plunging beneath the waves, found myself in a glorious cavern, through whose rosy vault echoed the tones of a mighty organ. It must have been at this time that I staggered to the piano which stood in the corner of the room. Under ordinary circumstances I am a poor player ; yet I have a good ear and improvise with tolerable facility. My friend, therefore, expected to hear what he had often heard before from me—a trivial air, perhaps, and

some vulgar variations upon it ; and he was accordingly astonished when I began a wild melody like some of the quaint creations of Saint-Saëns, and played it (so my friend says) with brilliancy. For myself, I remember nothing of my performance.

My adventure with the piano seems to have turned the current of my ideas. I was led back to my chair by the fire ; and henceforward my visions, instead of being sublime, became ridiculous. I imagined that everything around me was animated and that I was, in addition, surrounded by many absurd and animated things that had no existence save in my imagination. Life appeared to be a grand joke, and the mere delight of existence made me laugh boisterously. I could not help laughing : everything was so irresistibly comic. Now a brace of hook-nosed cronies came forward and danced a fantastic dance on the hearth-rug at my feet, making meanwhile the most extraordinary grimaces : and now a duck, with a bill at least a yard long, waddled up, and bursting into a broad and miraculous grin, congratulated me upon

the comicality of life. The clock smiled, the chairs moved, the coals in the grate were little giggling imps. Yet I felt perfectly at ease, and watched the transformations without any sensations of surprise, much less of terror.

Then succeeded the third stage of the influence of the hachish. Numbness seemed to steal over me. I imagined that my legs turned to lead ; and the idea grew until I became wholly metallic—a living machine, an engine through whose valves the steam hissed and whistled, threatening the speedy disruption of the whole affair. While in this state I could not move ; and yet when my friend aroused me I could still give broken and wandering replies to his questions. Even this qualified measure of consciousness deserted me in time, however ; and I went to sleep. An hour later, or about four and a quarter hours after having swallowed the hachish, I awoke, dazed and dreamy ; but a draught of cold water immediately brought me to myself, and in ten minutes more the influence of the drug had entirely evaporated. What

is more, I had a furious appetite and at midnight I ate a great supper. I had no headache, no lassitude, and no nervousness; and when, in the small hours, I turned into bed; I slept soundly, dreamlessly and naturally, and rose next morning none the worse for my experiment. My pulse-beats, it is true, had at one time during the evening risen to one hundred and ten per minute, but they had soon again become normal, and I had no further feverish symptoms.

Is it astonishing that I took hachish again and again? I think not. Who in my position would not have done as I did? But my methods improved. I procured some of that sweet Turkish confection known as *Rahat Lakoum*, and used it as a medium wherein to take the bitter drug that carried me to Elysium whenever I would.





II. NIGHTMARE.

ONE of the most delightful of the many sensations produced by hachish is the one which the Orientals call "Keef." It often follows upon periods of great mental excitement, and may be described as a feeling of immense and illimitable calm, of sublime spiritual elevation, and of complete liberation from the trammels of the flesh. The true body seems to painlessly shrivel and shrink off, leaving nothing but a kind of *linga sharira*, or astral body, which is transparent and imponderable. While he is in this blissful condition the hachish-eater floats like thistle-down in the air, but, instead of being the sport of the breeze, he can by the slightest possible exercise of the will, or rather of the wish, transport himself in any direction or to any distance. And so real is this sensation that once, when I was enjoying it and was, in imagination,

floating easily about my room, I remember noticing that a thick layer of dust covered the top of a bookcase. In my dream I made a mark in the dust with my finger; and, when I got rid of the effects of the drug, my first action was to mount a chair in order to see, not whether I had actually made my mark, but whether I could not remove the dust without summoning a servant.

This condition is, I say, one of the most delightful of experiences. It often, however, introduces some of the most disagreeable sensations,—disagreeable, that is, when felt for the first time, but afterwards only gruesomely grotesque.

For instance, I had once been in "Keef," and seemed to imagine, as I lay back in an arm-chair, that the effects of the drug were passing off. I stretched myself, as if I were awaking from a heavy sleep, and attempted to thrust my hand through my hair, when, horror! my fingers passed through my crackling skull, and into my warm, cheesy brain!

At another time, too, as I leaned for-

ward to rise, my head rolled from off my shoulders, and, falling to the floor, broke and burst like a huge egg upon the carpet.

And once again,—it is unpleasant to have to describe the fantasy,—as I walked falteringly hither and thither, the whole of my internal economy fell out with a hideous splash.

But more commonly, “Keef” gives way to, and blends itself with, a species of fantastic nightmare. I remember well how, having for a long time sat in adoring contemplation of a divinely lovely sylph, I saw her move slowly away, and, agonised at the idea of losing her, followed the retreating figure to the entrance of a stone staircase that led downwards into the dimly lighted bowels of the earth. She descended, and I went after her. In a moment she disappeared, for the staircase was a winding one; but I could still hear the patter of her bare feet, and I quickened my pace. In a few minutes I ceased to be master of my movements. My progress became a run, a head-long rush, and then a sheer

precipitation. Finally I reached the bottom : but, as my feet touched the stone pavement, they clung to it and grew to it and became one with it ; and when I looked for my sylph, she had turned into a creature like a bat with long crane-like legs, and stood laughing at me there, and assuring me that never, never again should I budge from the centre of the earth. And sometimes "Keef" merges into a kind of witches' sabbath, a grotesquely revolting *danse macabre*. I can best illustrate this kind of transition by means of a story. I do not mean to say that the incidents which are described occurred to me in consecutive order. In my dream I simply was conscious of the two conditions ; first the "Keef" state, the state of blissful happiness and contentment, and second the nightmare of horror, disgust, rebellion and fiendish revengefulness and exultation. Each of the two came before me as a mental panorama. The one merged into the other, I scarcely know how. They were separated, and yet intimately blending, just like dissolving

views. The intermediate section represents this process of dissolution.

I

I used to love!

It is an old story, for all men tell it thoughtlessly. But, when I say that I loved, I mean something more than most men mean. I used indeed to love. In those old days I ate and drank love. Perhaps the diet was a sickly one, yet it was enough for me. Nay! I could not do without it. People had whispered to me tales of change and treachery and falsehood: but did such things trouble me? I was set far above the little things that make earth wretched. She and I were like gods. For us there was nothing false or vain. I was once grieved with myself because a doubting fancy floated lightly across a dream of mine. Any kind of doubt seemed sacrilege. It stained the purity of my faith and her trust. I had no aim save love. I thought only of her: and she, I was persuaded, thought only of me. How could such true passion lead to anything save happiness? And how

could I doubt, when her lips were mine to kiss; and her blue eyes, after looking dreamily into mine, closed as if in ecstasy, while her cheeks grew pale as primroses, until it seemed that her dear life was about to flee away? She was mine. Could any other man's kiss be to her what mine was? No! we were one in body, brain and spirit, one for ever. Yet I loved her so well that, had it been needful, I could have given her up to another: and I told her so. And she answered that, although she might die, she could never change: and that for her there were no other future and no other love. I was cruel in my kindness, she said: and she kissed me with her red lips and bid me never be so cruel again. Then, to my eyes, she became an angel; and God forgive me if I worshipped her, no longer a woman but a thing of glory, so lovely she was. She had bound me to her with a thousand fairy spells and tricks, until I no longer reasoned. To gaze upon her was to be her ready slave; and to kiss her was to enter paradise.

Thus time went on. My days were fair and bright, for I had found the perfect woman of a young man's dream, and gained the perfect love of a young man's imaginings. And she was as fair and bright as the days. Our love did not cloy; and it did not harden into duty; for all her wiles were fresh and grew no older: every hour she taught me some new wonder. What are the dreams of midnight? What are the reveries that come to a man in the sunshine of the afternoon? They only paint some fleeting scene the memory of which lingers deliciously for at most an hour. But the craft of love endures. Visions are on gossamer webs: but the landscapes of love are realities. You may touch and handle them. In love's woods there are live birds that sing true songs as sweet as the ditties of grey Rhineland. Love is no mirage on the haze of the desert. It is a fair oasis with a well of cool clear water lurking beneath green leaves and sparkling like a gem in the twilight. Everyone at first doubts the reality: but all may play Saint Thomas;

and none can doubt for long. And then the lover finds how he is lord. All is his and for him; and all depends upon him and is the complement of him. The discovery may make him swoon; but when his life comes back to him again he will see the trees and flowers still fresh beside him. He has gained a kind of perpetual youth. His wonder cannot tire: his longing cannot flag: for every hour joy comes to him unexpected and in new disguise.

There was a serpent in Eden: but only love was in my paradise; and there was no room for aught else. The whole air that wrapped us round was love; and it folded us in from hell and earth. Other things might be doubtful; but love was not. It was deathless and almighty. Who can doubt his own heart? Who can doubt the heart that he possesses as his own? Who can doubt the woman who slumbers in his arms, fenced around with his love, and, perchance, whispering his name in her dreams? One touch of her lips stills all doubt. But I had no

doubts. There was not a cloud in the sky : no passing storm swept across my fair oasis : no rude wind shook down the ever-ripening fruit that hung luscious above me. I was in the midst of peace.

2

In some lands of crag and mountain the morning dawns like the beginning of a new era of ceaseless summer light. Day has never been brighter. The old snow of the winter melts and vanishes amid the bright green grass : the birds come forth : and song and perfume are everywhere. Then there is a crash ! Like some masked battery of guns opened among the pines upon the height, the volleying thunder bursts upon creation and shakes the hills with sudden thud and roar ; while the rain pelts sideways in great drops, and the gale tears shrieking over the staggering stricken woods ; and they are swept away and dashed pell-mell hither and thither, with huge branches tossed abroad for sport or scattered carelessly in drifts of white impenetrable mist. All becomes dark, chilly and terrible. The world

has lost its beauty : and earth and heaven scowl fierce and hateful through the tangled wreck.

One morning when I awoke I was alone. The light was gone ; the air seemed cold and thick ; and the wild winds of the world swept over me. It was surely a dream. I could not be awake. And where was she who was clasped over night in my arms ? She could not have gone ! How could I think so ? No ; it was a dream ! She was still at my side, and I would kiss her. But nay ! I turned and kissed, and kissed a clammy stone ! Yet how could she have gone ? Had she not sworn to stay ? Did she not love me ? Was she not mine ? Why : I had clasped her close a hundred times. Her last words had been words of love ; and they at least had been neither dream nor fancy. I still felt the imprint of her good-night kiss. The touch of her warm hand was still fresh upon me. But she was gone !

I started up ! Day had come again. It was no dream. She was gone. And

it was far harder to credit it, than it had ever been to believe that love was deathless. Yet I knew the truth. All things shrieked it into my ears. My well was dry. My oasis was withered. On the unlimited sand the birds lay dead in the sunlight ; and their songs and echoes had departed for ever.

I know not whether I became mad ; but I flung my hands towards the mocking sky : and fell down upon my face and swooned.

When I revived I knew all. It forced its passage into my guarded brain ; for I could not bar it out. I was her dupe. Her pretty tongue had wagged to lull my heart while hers had skulked away to love another. Her word, her faith, her truth were all forgotten ; and even as she lay in my last embrace that other's arms were about her soul. She had gone, gone to him ! God help me for a miserable one ; and God help her for a wicked woman !

3

Ah ! There you are, laughing again. You seem, indeed, to laugh more merrily than of

yore ! Do I remember that old story ? Bah ! Of course I remember it. It is another woman's story :—nothing more ! I always hear the same old tales of them. And you ? What do you think of them, eh ? I could not find in life the love I sought. I must be content to find comedy, or to make it for myself as I can out of the wreckage. Aye ! Cracked bells make a wondrous comic jangle. Don't you like the jangling ? Why not ? You are all bilious, you miserable worldlings : and I please myself. Self is sufficient master for any man. He needs neither a tyrant nor a mistress : and bilious fools who have head-aches have only themselves to thank. You smile at me. There is a grin for you. How do you like it ? There is nothing that shall not make me sneer to-day ! I have learnt that little lesson ; and I ought to have learnt it well, for I learnt it with a pair of lips for my book. Where are they now ? Look at this green mound, just newly turfed. Even now the crabbed old digger is scraping his boots on his spade. The

wet clay falls upon the sodden grass just above where a dead head would lie if any chance had put it into the grave. Do you like the man's indifferent ways? Does she? Yes, fool! She lies beneath. Go, and wipe your old nose with prejudice, my friend, and sniffle to yourself! Those lips are there, my pair of lips, just six feet down beneath that clay. They were a pleasant book to read a future in. I have no regret. They pleased me well enough! Now, if you want them, take that spade and dig; but don't disturb the worms. You will not find that those lips are good for much. They never were. But they were what I liked. And others liked them too; but I was first! He may not have known that! How soft they were! Yet now they must be rotten. I should like to see the worms enjoying them; for, indeed, old fool, I have no jealousy, although you, square-toes, look as yellow as if you had been eating dead men's hearts to make you bilious.

You must dance, there on her grave. Dance with your hob-nailed boots to

bruise her breast, or crush it in. Be heavy on her head. Never mind the mould in her dead eyes. She used to blind me in the olden days.

Look at the gallows there ! Look at the raven ! How he caws ! He is most comical. While you are dancing he beats a kind of time with his dry legs. Ha ! His ugly beak has flesh upon it, torn from those black rags that hang below him and swing in the wind. What are the rags ? Ha ! Ha ! Only her cavalier ! See how he swings towards her gallantly while his arms flap like a scarecrow's empty sleeves.

Bah ! That is enough ! Topple the crabbed old digger into an empty grave, spade and all. Everything goes in there sooner or later. And cheer up, friend Bilious-face ! Dance and grin ! 'Tis the world's comedy : so do not sniff, but take your fiddle, and scrape a jig. And if you will not dance yourself, let me. Ha ! Now quicker ! Now quicker ! Never mind ! We are merry now ; and merry we will be until the morning !



III. PARADISE.

I do not know exactly how much to believe and how much to disbelieve of Théophile Gautier's tale about *le club des hachichins* at the hôtel Pimodan on the Ile Saint-Louis; but there is no doubt whatever in my mind that the author, if not an "adept" in the use of hachish, had at least experienced the effects of the drug. I cannot, however, readily comprehend that any enthusiastic devotees of the narcotic should deliberately form themselves into an association for its enjoyment in company. Once in a way, perhaps, sociable hachish-eating may be charming as a comparative novelty; but the best delights of the drug are, after all, obtainable by the solitary. The patient's first craving is for quiet. He does not want to be disturbed, or to be reminded of the things of the work-a-day world. His best sanctuary is the silence of a

warm and cosy library, furnished with snug carpets, rugs and lounges, and with a piano. No one, however, should take hachish without first having taken counsel with his medical man ; for the drug affects divers people in divers ways. We are told by Dr. O'Shaughnessy, that in England he has given ten or twelve grains with impunity, and has seen no effects produced, and Dr. Fronmüller considers that eight grains form the smallest useful dose when it is sought to bring the patient under the full influence : but Dr. Garrod and others are of opinion that a much smaller quantity is sufficient in the majority of cases. What, therefore, may be innocuous to one may be well-nigh fatal to another : and the only method of arriving at the proper dose is by a series of careful experiments.

While a man is under the full influence of the hachish he can enjoy little save a contemplative kind of *dolce far niente*. He may imagine that he is moving about, and, perhaps, vigorously exerting himself ; but the chances are greatly in

favour of his remaining where he was when the drug first began to operate. It is certainly impossible for him at the time to conjure up energy sufficient to enable him to write a record of his experiences. But, when all is over, he can remember; and his memory, in such circumstances, is often remarkably vivid. Of the myriads of curious ideas that during a couple of hours of blissful dream have rushed through my brain, I have several times remembered enough to be able to weave from them in my waking moments a tolerably consecutive narrative. Of such dream-stories I have, perhaps, half a dozen in my possession. All of them are, I am aware, more or less imperfect, for the mind that conceived them was, at the instant, conscious of no difference between the real and the ideal. Some of them are, for this reason, too impossible to print. The machinery of them is far too glaringly impracticable, far too obviously unworkable. And in writing out even those which seem to me to partake least of the supernatural, I have been obliged to fill

in gaps and supply or suggest motives which, in my dreams, were all haze and mystery.

Two of these dream stories I intend to give. In the following idyll I have only to a limited extent exercised the editorial function of pruning and elaborating. Had I allowed myself a greater degree of freedom, I should have made a better story of it. But, in that case, I should not have preserved the peculiar character of the apocalypse ; and that, I think, is its flavour of dreamland. As it is, I am not certain that I have not gone too far. For instance, I was myself an actor in some of the scenes of the dream ; and in writing it out I have abolished my own personality and told the tale in the third person, supplying names to all the characters. It will serve, however, as a specimen, although a faulty one, of some curious and not un-poetical imaginings. It appeared to me in the form of a succession of pictures, the personæ of which were a young man, who was sometimes myself and sometimes another, an old

man, a dwarf, and two women, who were different, but yet strangely and exactly alike. One of these last may be taken to be a special incarnation of evil. The visions may have occupied my mind for five minutes, possibly for only as many seconds. But in any case I caught so fleeting a glance at them that I am almost astonished that I was ever able to remember them, save as a confused and incoherent series of lightning flashes upon the scenery of a dark and unknown landscape.

I. Vox Clamantis.

"My daughter," quoth Father Paul to Stella, "you may depend upon it that it is no sin to love. Was not the holy Peter himself a married man? We may be sure that he married where he loved, though, possibly, he may have wedded a shrew who soured him. That is my explanation of his quick temper."

"But when I think of Gerard all other thoughts fly out of my head; and I am always thinking of him. Is that right?"

Father Paul screwed up his eyes and looked amusedly at his questioner.

"This is the first time that I have ever heard any pretty girl say that," he replied, with a smile of satisfaction. "If you think it wrong, my daughter, it is wrong. Ask your conscience."

"That is all very well," returned Stella, laughing; "but conscience does not tell people everything. It doesn't tell me to turn out my toes, for instance."

"Yes, it tells you to turn out your toes when once you have learnt that to turn out your toes is right. In the same way it only tells you to do right when once you have learnt what right is."

"That is exactly what my conscience wants to be taught, then. You see, Father Paul, I have no experience."

"Neither have I," said Father Paul, good humouredly. "Did any one ever hear of a young girl asking advice from a confirmed old bachelor in matters of love?"

"Well, tell me what you think, Father Paul."

"Whom ought you to love first of all?"

"The good God."

"And next?"

"My neighbour."

"And lastly?"

"Myself."

"And you try to obey these precepts, my daughter?"

"I try."

"Good! Consider Gerard as yourself. Place him in the list with yourself; first, the good God? second, your neighbour; third, Gerard and yourself."

"But, Father ——"

"Not a bit of it! You must look at the matter in that way. One of these days he and you will come and ask me to bind you together, and thereafter you will be as one flesh. You see that if you place Gerard any higher you will cheat either God or your neighbour of their due; and if he loves you, my daughter, he will be contented with the company in which I put him."

"But, surely, Gerard is my neighbour?"

Father Paul laughed. "Don't you understand, daughter?"

Stella thought for a moment. "You mean," she said, "that I am not to think of him so as to interfere with my thought for the good God and my neighbour?"

"Exactly," replied Father Paul; "and remember, too, that there may be danger in the fact that when you please Gerard you please yourself. Too much devotion to him may be little better than pure selfishness."

Stella looked unhappy.

"I do not tell you," continued Father Paul, "not to love him and to be devoted to him. But now that I have taught your conscience, it will better tell you what is right than even I can. There! I shall leave the matter with you. You have heard it said that dirt is matter out of place. So with sin; it is act, thought, or word out of place."

And Father Paul moved on, while Stella sat down and began to think.

It was early morning. The dew still glistened on blade of grass and leaf of

bush ; the sun had scarcely warmed the air ; the insects had not yet come forth ; and the birds overhead were chattering with anxious expectation of something to eat. From their high perches they could survey a broad landscape that seemed to melt away into the light undissipated mists that still slumbered upon the far horizon. The sky was clear and blue, yet tinged with dull grey in the cold west ; but in the east it was a haze of golden glamour in the midst of which shone the glorious sun.

Stella sat on a wooded hillside, upon a huge trunk that lay where, years before, it had fallen, cast down by lightning, the traces of which were still visible upon it. At her feet grew pale primroses, some of which she stooped and plucked, only to pull them to pieces when she had them in her white hands.

“ He is to meet me here this morning,” she said to herself, but half aloud ; “ and I know what he wants to say to me ; yet I do not know what to say to him. Father Paul tells me that I must consider him

after my neighbour, and certainly my brother Alban is my neighbour. I know that, because, although I love Alban, I find it not half so pleasant to be with him as to be with Gerard. It requires a little self denial. But I promised Alban to stay with him until his marriage, and he will not marry yet for half a year. If he were not so fond of me I would ask him to let me go ; but he cannot spare me, and he must not be left all alone. He would be miserable if I were not with him, and I should be selfish if I were to leave him. Yet Gerard is always so anxious. He can never wait even for little things. I do not know how I shall persuade him to agree with me. But I must remember what Father Paul has said ; and I must do it. First, I must serve the good God ; then I must take care of my brother Alban ; and then I may go to Gerard. How easy all that would seem if only I could reverse matters ! First Gerard—— But no ! I am sinning already : first the good God. Yes ; I will try to do as Father Paul says. But

Father Paul cannot know how hard it is. Everyone loves him, and he loves everybody, in one sense ; but, in another, how different he is from Gerard or from me ! I am sure he never loved any one as Gerard loves me, or as I love Gerard. He is like an old saint, only more human ; for I cannot believe that the great saints ever laughed, or joked, or wrestled with their disciples as Father Paul does. Yet Paul is a saint. I am sure that the good God loves him and honours him very much. He is so kind, and so stern at the same time ; so gentle, and yet so strong. Perhaps Gerard, when he grows old, will be like him. I hope he will, but Gerard is not a bit like him now. He is very good, very good and kind to me—kinder even than Father Paul ; yet some do not like him, while all like Father Paul. Even Alban does not, I think, like him very much. I remember we had words about it. They were not many ; but I was so sorry, and, though I kissed Alban and he kissed me to make it up, I cannot quite forget. But then

Alban looks for everything in Gerard. He thinks Gerard ought to be perfection, and he makes no allowances for him. I think Alban is just a little bit uncharitable about him; but I am sure it is only because he loves me so much that he is jealous of any one who loves me more. I must reconcile them before Alban marries, and before I leave him."

"You are up early, Stella," said Gerard, coming towards her, and then taking her hand and raising it to his lips.

"I was up with the sun, Gerard."

"Because you could not sleep?"

"Oh, no! because I could lie no longer. Do you not sleep well?"

"How can I sleep when I am always thinking of you, Stella? The stars look down upon me and keep me awake. It is as though your eyes were watching me. Do you never think of me?"

"I think of you very much, but you do not keep me awake. Sometimes I dream of you."

"And I of you, when I sleep. What

was I doing when you dreamt of me last?"

"You were freeing a poor bird which had been caught in a net. And I, Gerard?"

"You were sitting near me, and I was telling you how I love you. Now, let me sit beside you that we may talk. There will be plenty of room if I put my arm so."

"But you are not to put it so, Gerard. There is room without that."

"And why should I not put it so, Stella?"

"What would you say if you heard of Father Paul sitting with his arm round my waist?"

"But I am not Father Paul!"

"No, you are Gerard."

"Therefore ——"

"Therefore, my boy, you may not: you must wait. When I am yours, Gerard, will be time enough. Do you know that your arm feels like a chain round my waist that takes away my liberty? Do not think me unkind, but I love my

liberty, and there is no harm in that until I give it up to you."

"And when may that be, Stella?"

"Need we talk about it now? I must wait until my brother Alban is married."

"Do you love Alban, then, better than me?"

"I have promised him."

"And you have promised me. I have waited a long time now."

"Yes, you have waited a month."

"Is it only a month? Even if it be no more, it is a long time. Tell me, Stella; when?"

"When Alban is married."

"Does he wish that?"

"I think he wishes that."

"Then, he is selfish."

"But he has not said so. He has not pressed me to stay with him. He wishes me, I know, to please myself, and I think it right to remain with him."

"And yet you love me, Stella?"

"I am sure you do not doubt it, Gerard."

"Then, are we not wasting our best

days? Here is the summer upon us. Soon it will be over: and there will come a short autumn and a long dreary winter. So it is with our lives."

"There will be other summers. Besides, there is a whole one still before us."

"We may not see it."

"We may not see to-morrow. Only the good God knows whether we shall. And we are so young, Gerard; only children."

"I am twenty-three."

"Yes, only twenty-three; and I am eighteen."

"Eighteen already! Why should we not enjoy those sunny days together?"

"But, surely, we may. Alban is often away, and I can as often be with you. We will go for walks together in the pine woods. I will pick you nosegays of wild flowers. Can we not be very happy?"

"Yes, happy; but, if you were my own, how much happier!"

"I can never understand that, Gerard.

But let us talk of something else. Have you seen Alban?"

"I met him this morning on the moor. He was walking alone and gazing at the turf. He did not see me. I daresay he was thinking of someone. Does he not, Stella, desire the day when she shall be his?"

"He thinks it well to wait."

"If so, he does not love like me. Oh, Stella, how can you delay? Why do you not take pity on me?"

"For the present I am bound to him. If I were not I would come; Gerard, you know I would come. You should carry me wherever you would; but I must keep my word and do my duty. When Alban is married I shall be only for the great God and for you."

"This is a chivalric notion of yours, Stella; but it is a mistaken one, I think."

"Perhaps it may be my whim, Gerard; but I believe I am right. However, since it is a sore subject, let us leave it. Let us walk on together and enjoy the morning, for the sun is already high and the best part of the day will soon be over."

He silently accompanied her along the woodland path, carpeted with soft turf and fringed on either side with dew-filled flowers.

"Is not this like Eden, Gerard?"

"We, then, are Adam and Eve."

"If you will."

"Then you are only for me! Oh, Stella! why do you wish me to wait?"

His face drew nearer to hers, while his hands fell and clasped her waist.

"Let us go away, Gerard!"

"Go away? Where is it more pleasant than here? No, let us remain!"

He drew her closer to him and gazed down into her brown eyes; but as he gazed they grew terrified, and involuntarily he followed the direction of their glance.

There, twined about a low swinging branch, hung a glittering snake.

"Look, Gerard!"

"But it will not harm us, my own!"

"I seem to have been asleep for an instant, Gerard, and to have dreamt that it spoke instead of you! Is it not beautiful?"

"Yes."

"But it is accursed! Let us go, Gerard! I cannot stay here."

And, freeing her lithe form from his unwilling grasp, she moved away, without once looking back.

"Stella! stop!"

"No! Let us go out into the sunshine again, Gerard. To-day I am afraid of the woods."

But he rapidly followed her, and seized her hand.

"Do not go; I cannot spare you."

Yet she went on, even though he knelt at her feet and covered her hands with kisses.

"Alban will be looking for me, Gerard."

"And to-morrow?"

"To-morrow perhaps you will find me by the old trunk."

And she stood still for a moment to bid him good-bye. He would have kissed her on the lips, but she only offered her soft cheek, and ere he could struggle for more she had escaped him and was fleeing lightly away.

2. Eve or Lilith.

It was morning again, and Gerard climbed the hill to keep his tryst at the fallen tree. Above him the undissipated mists of night clung like moving curls of down, thickening as he went, and swaying fitfully in the breath of the cool air: but below the plain was bright and clear, and the joyous sun was putting forth its new strength. A cloud had settled upon the wood, and had transformed the old trees and their twisted roots into strange shapes, which seemed to rise and flee at his approach. The rabbits, too, fled as a dry twig crackled beneath his feet, and the rogue-eyed squirrels scampered off among the high branches to give the alarm.

Gerard had almost to feel his way when he reached the denser part of the thicket. He stumbled over stones: he tore his skin with unseen brambles; and more than once he came into collision with some giant fir and was obliged to retrace his steps in order to regain the path which

he had lost, for the heavy cloud deceived him at every moment, and its floating masses misled him into mistaking them for solid objects. Yet, to his astonishment, he found the glade, wherein lay the blasted trunk, quite clear and full of sunbeams. The mist surrounded it on all sides, but did not enter it; and he could look upwards, as from the bottom of a huge well, and see the deep blue sky of heaven. Stella was not there; and he was annoyed, for his whole being was longing for her, and his lips were aching for the kiss which he had promised himself. Yet he was early. Doubtless she would soon come. A bright flower, just opening its dewy petals to the cherishing day, caught his eye, and he stooped to examine it.

When he rose and looked again he saw a well-known form sitting on the fallen tree.

She did not see him, for her back was turned, and he stole to her noiselessly from behind and gently put his arm round her.

She trembled, turned her face and smiled, but did not speak.

How fresh her lips looked ! He did not attempt to resist the impulse to kiss them, and, after a little laughing struggle, he succeeded. Their lips had never met before.

He vaulted over the trunk, took his seat by her side, and put both arms round her neck. Neither spoke.

Her beautiful eyes sought the ground, and on her cheeks was a slight blush, born of shame and happiness. He took her hand in his and passed his fingers lovingly over the white, veined skin. "You love me after all !" he said, at last, while he played with her soft, rounded arm, and gazed into her face.

She did not answer, but looked at him with that wonderful look which seems to come from the soul—that look so unearthly that no human words can explain it. It means submission, but willing submission ; and it is a glad look ; yet there is no smile in it. No woman who does not love very truly is mistress of it,

and many women give it but once in their lives. It is soft and beseeching and staid : it is a revelation, for one instant, from another nature ; and it is apologetic ; but withal it is indescribable.

Gerard kissed her again, and, as he did so, watched her eyes close, as with languor.

"My own, now and for ever !" he whispered. How her heart beat !

"And you really love me ?" she asked, half timidly.

Of course he kissed her once more.

"This is our paradise, Stella——"

"Eve ! I am the Eve of paradise, and you shall be Adam !"

"But Eve was never half so lovely as you. I dare say she had big feet, for instance."

She stretched out a foot and regarded it.

"And mine are not so small, Adam," she smiled.

"It is very little and very lovely, Eve. Do you give that also to me ?"

She laughed. "Why do you want me at all ?"

"Because, Eve, I love you."

"But you will soon grow tired."

"Of you?"

"Yes, of me, Adam."

"I am willing to undertake the experiment, nevertheless. There is no record that my namesake ever grew tired of his Eve."

"Do you suppose they never quarrelled?"

"We do not hear of it."

"But after his cowardice in casting the blame of the Fall upon her?"

"Well, we shall not run the same risk."

"Ah! Who can tell? And when I grow old, Adam?"

"I also shall grow old. But why think of that? We are young now."

"Yes; we are young."

"And will make the experiment, Eve. Why should we ever part again?"

She did not reply, but rested silent and happy against his shoulder.

The mist still hung thickly about the trees.

"Come, my own!" he said, and his

words sounded huskily as he spoke them ;
“ we cannot stay here. Let us go lower,
where there is no cloud to chill us by its
presence.”

She rose with him and clung to his arm,
and together they entered the mist that
filled the wood. It was like passing
through a realm of spectres.

Suddenly Gerard halted. At his feet
lay a snake, such as he had seen on the
previous morning. Even the cloud did
not hide its glittering colours.

“ How strange, Eve !”

“ Come,” she said, lightly stepping over
it ; and the serpent trailed its way into a
tuft of thick herbage.

The mist grew denser and the air
chillier. Gerard shuddered involuntarily.
Eve seemed to find her way as if by in-
stinct, and he no longer stumbled over
gnarled roots, or tore his skin with
impeding branches. They had quitted
the beaten path, and were walking rapidly
over a smooth and mossy sward. He had
given himself up to her guidance.

The cloud seemed more impenetrable

than ever, when Gerard became conscious of the existence of some lofty obstacle in front of them, and gradually distinguished that it was a wall of grey stone.

"Where are we, Eve?" he asked.

"Wait!" she said; and feeling with her disengaged hand for some distance she succeeded in finding the door of which she was in search. "Now, Adam, I have a surprise for you. Do you deserve it?"

He did not know what to expect, or what to reply, but he bent his face to hers and kissed her again.

"Supposing, Adam, that I were to show you a real paradise, would you run away from it?"

"Not while you were there," he laughed, wondering at her whim.

"And you would be a good Adam?"

"To you? Yes! Do I not love you, Eve?"

"And you would love me always?"

He took her in his arms, and lifted her up in his strong embrace.

"Here, then, is the key," she said.

"Open the door." And, as soon as he

liberated her, she pressed a curiously wrought key into his hand. He took it, and did as she bade him.

Within there seemed to be no mist, but the overhanging foliage rendered the place somewhat dark, although sunlight was visible beyond.

Gerard withdrew the key, entered with Eve, and closed the door behind him.

At that instant the distant strains of soft music fell upon his ears, but ere he could speak Eve said, "And, now, if you would have a complete surprise, I must blindfold you, Adam."

He stood still while she tied the kerchief from her own neck over his eyes. It was delicious to feel her fingers in his hair, and he smiled.

"This is a strange freak of yours, Eve."

"Come!" she exclaimed, taking his hand in hers and leading him onwards. "I am taking you into the real paradise of which I told you."

The music ceased as they approached it, and complete silence prevailed. They

passed over grass and fine gravel, and lastly over stone steps and a smooth stone pavement. Gerard no longer felt chilly. The touch of Eve's hand thrilled him, and, in addition, he knew that the warm sun was shining on him.

Where was he? He could but wonder and wait ; for, once, when he began to ask a question, Eve put a finger to his lips and enjoined silence.

She led him to a seat, which was apparently covered with velvet.

"Now !" she said, as she removed the bandage from his eyes, "here is my paradise !"

For a few moments the light blinded him. Then he saw that he was sitting in a marble court, which was lightly roofed with a gaily-coloured awning of embroidered cloth. At intervals stood rare shrubs, bearing beautiful flowers or luscious fruits ; and in the centre a small fountain sent up a cool, limpid stream, which fell again, a cloud of fine, white spray, into a broad basin of carved malachite. On the white floor were

spread thick Persian rugs of many hues. Low, luxurious couches, covered with bright silken stuffs, lined the walls; and it was upon one of these last that he was sitting with Eve at his side.

"What is this?" he cried, when he had overcome his first astonishment.

"Our paradise."

"But yours—how can it be yours, Stella?"

"I am not Stella! I am Eve!" she said, softly.

He looked at her and took her hand.

"You are Stella and Eve!"

"Only Eve, and you are Adam."

"But I knew nothing of all this. It seems as if it had sprung from the earth or dropped from the sky."

"It is my surprise for you. Do you like it?"

"Like it, Eve! I cannot realise it yet. Is it yours?"

"And yours, Adam."

"To do as you like with?"

"To do as you like with."

"And you, my own, are mine, too, in this paradise?"

Eve turned her brown eyes to his. "Yes! I too!" she murmured. "All is yours!"

He drew her towards him, and her head fell upon his shoulder, while her thick tresses bathed his face in their fragrant richness.

"Is it all real? Are you real? Is life real, my own; or am I dreaming?"

"Come," she said, "and you shall see;" and she led him from the court into a smaller one containing a table, upon which lay broad dishes of ripe fruit and flagons of wine. "Let us take our first breakfast together, Adam! But wait!"

She led him on to a cool chamber, hung with Indian work.

"There," she said, "you will find all you need. Take off your old dress and put on the one I have laid ready for you. I will go and change mine. We must be fitly robed in paradise."

She laughed merrily, and ere he let her go he kissed her and extorted a promise that she would not leave him for long.

His room was not large, for it was

evidently intended merely as a dressing-room. The window, of coloured glass, was wide open, and through the casement he could see a lovely garden which, as far as his eyes could judge, was of great size. Taking off his clothes, he dressed himself in those which he found prepared for him—loose trousers of silk, gathered in round the ankles, a silken shirt, and a jacket embroidered with gold; and as soon as he had done so, he returned to the court in which breakfast was spread. There he sat wondering and waiting.

Eve soon reappeared. He thought, as she came towards him, that he had never seen her look so wonderfully beautiful. Her dark hair was tied in a long plait which reached to her waist, and contrasted remarkably with the loose, open bodice of milk-white cambric which she wore. Her neck was bare, and low on her breast against her pure skin nestled a single rose-bud, pink as coral, and half hidden by a small frond of delicate fern. For the rest, her dress consisted of a short skirt of straw-coloured Indian silk, em-

broidered in blue and red, and of flowing trousers of a lighter shade, made, like the bodice, of almost transparent cambric. Round her ankles were numerous narrow rings of gold, and her bare feet were thrust into slippers of rich crimson velvet.

Gerard rose and passionately took her in his arms.

"Do you like me?" she asked, laughingly looking up into his face.

"Do I like you? Eve, I worship you! You are perfection, and you could not be lovelier."

"And do you like our garden of Eden?"

"Yes; because you are in it! But, Eve, it seems so unreal."

"And do I seem unreal, Adam? Can you not feel that I am flesh and blood?"

He kissed her full lips and then her smooth, fair neck.

"But I cannot understand! It seems like a dream."

She smiled as she archly took his finger, and, putting it between her teeth, bit it.

"Now, you know, that would wake you, Adam, if you were dreaming. But let us have breakfast. How can I walk when you hold me so tightly?"

"You shall not walk. I will carry you."

And he raised her light, lithe form, and bore it to a soft divan.

"But where is the table, Adam? We are nowhere within reach of it."

"Let us have kisses for breakfast, Eve!"

"Oh, no! There are wine and fruit. I must convince you that you are not dreaming. But we can sit here." And she clapped her hands.

A heavy curtain was immediately drawn aside, and a curious apparition came before them in the person of a hideous dwarf, scarcely three feet in height. He was dressed in a rich costume of dark colours; a gold-sheathed scimitar hung from his girdle; and on his head was a turban, in which sparkled an immense opal.

"Move the table towards us, Narjac,"

commanded Eve with a gesture of authority: and the deformed creature, who seemed to be possessed of immense strength, bowed in silence and obeyed her order. Then, still silent, he left the court as he had entered it, and replaced the heavy curtain behind him.

"He is a useful servant," exclaimed Eve. "He knows everything and can do everything. I have only to speak. I call him a servant, though he is really a slave; but I do not treat him as such, because he is indispensable. He understands me so well."

"Never mind your black Narjac, Eve; I cannot think of anything but you."

"Not even of breakfast, Adam?"

"I prefer your lips."

"But look at this peach; what colour, and what a soft velvety down!"

"Your cheeks are better, Eve."

"Nevertheless, I like the peach."

"Well, then, let us breakfast; and after breakfast ——."

"Yes; after breakfast, what?"

"Love, Eve."

"But there is love in Eden even at breakfast, I hope, Adam. Take the peach and cut it, and give yourself some wine. You must be tired."

"How can I be tired, Eve? This is such a wonderful place!"

"Yet I used to be tired sometimes before you came, in spite of this paradise of ours."

"I shall never tire in it with you, Eve."

"Nor I with you, if ——"

"If?"

"If you always love me, Adam."

"Then, kiss me, and I will love you for ever."

And he passed his arm round her waist, and put his lips again to hers, and with his right hand he laughingly fed her with the luscious fruit which he had peeled and cut.

3. Reality.

The day was fine and warm, and during all its sunny hours Adam and Eve roamed about their Eden, finding new beauties at every step.

Bright convolvuluses twined in every thicket ; tangled sword-grass grew luxuriant in every sheltered hollow ; pale-eyed daisies nestled on the sward ; the sweet scent of wild ragged roses filled the air ; while all the trees were musical with trill of nightingale and coo of dove. In the green depths of the limes the yellow-coated bees were busy ; they buzzed about the fragrant thyme on the overgrown mole-hills, and they sailed away heavy laden to store their golden honey in the heart of the gnarled old oak which, maybe, for ages had served as their treasury.

As the sun went down Adam and Eve sat together on a marble terrace that looked towards the golden west, and watched the bright orb slowly sink behind the distant pines.

Narjac brought a quaintly - worked brazier, in which shone a lurid mass of hot embers, and then, retiring, returned in a few moments with a golden tray, on which lay long-tubed pipes tipped with costly amber, a curious jar containing tobacco, and a flagon of wine.

"Leave us!" said Eve; and the obedient dwarf vanished in silence.

"Is not the evening lovely?" murmured Gerard, who half reclined on a huge divan by the side of Eve, and played with her luxuriant hair, now no longer plaited, but hanging in rich array around her shoulders. "Can there be anything more beautiful in nature than the soft coming of night?"

"It is beautiful, Adam, when one is happy."

"And when it brings one closer to love! The day did not seem long; yet it seems long when I look back upon it. And now, Eve, you are my own, are you not—all mine?"

She looked dreamily up at him through her long eye-lashes. "Yes, Adam!"

"Your hands?" and he kissed them.

"Yes!"

"And your lips, Eve—your lips that are like angels' food to me?"

"Yes, Adam!"

So passed the hours with Adam and Eve for many a day.

But love must either grow or wither : it must either soar or fall ; it cannot hover motionless.

Adam longed for variety, for his books, for his verses, or even for the outer world, into which he had never found his way since his arrival in Eden. He could have taken a spade and trenched the ground, so satiated was he with the cloying idleness of his dreamy life ; but there was no spade at hand, and he could make no labour for himself.

Yet he still loved Eve. The change was more with her than with him, and he could not understand it. Some vague shadow seemed to have come in between their hearts, and to have turned the sunshine of their life into a mysterious and unnatural darkness. Yet he hoped that all would still be fair again. Could Stella ever really cease to love him? No : he had been peevish or cold, and he had hurt her, perhaps ; but he would make amends in the future. More than ever, thenceforth, he sought to forestall her every wish, and to win her back to the

old love ; but his labour was vain. He felt her heart daily drifting away from his ; and she no longer greeted him with the happy smile which he had known of yore.

One morning, early, after he had roamed alone as usual, he heard a slight noise, and, turning, he beheld the hideous form of Narjac, who slunk stealthily away.

It was enough ! Gerard fled, he scarcely knew whither, down the steps of the terrace and across the broad garden, anxious only to escape. Onward he went, without a glance behind, through thickets, over brooks, until at last he was confronted by the wall of grey stone. No gate was visible, no door. He sought for one in vain ; but even had he found it he had no key. Yet he dared not stay. A huge oak partly overhung the summit. He climbed it ; he crawled out on a wide-spreading branch, and then he gained the top of the wall.

Before him was the rough world ; but to his eyes it looked fairer than the garden behind him. Without hesitation he lowered

himself to the full length of his arms, and dropped to the ground, far below. He fell; there was a dull shock, followed by a throbbing pain, and he lost consciousness.

4. Awake.

For hours he lay stunned and motionless amid the tall bracken at the foot of the wall. Even the linnets at last grew accustomed to his presence, and perched upon him, twittering to their mates in the thick branches above.

Then, as through some dreamy veil of floating mist, he seemed to see forms approaching along the woodland path—forms that to his slumbering senses appeared like those of ministering angels bringing to him comfort and consolation. The one was that of an old man; the other that of a maiden, upon whose sweet, sad face there were cruel traces of great sorrow.

* * *

“Gerard!”

“He has broken a bone, my daughter,” said Father Paul, bending and tenderly examining the sufferer.

"But, oh! he looks as if he were dead! Does he breathe? Let us take him away!"

"If we can carry him," quoth Father Paul. But there was no doubt about the matter. Gerard was a light weight for the gigantic strength of the good old man, who took him in his arms and bore him away to his own home.

"I told you he would come back, my daughter; and, because you did not lose hope he has come back. I daresay he will be better for the experience."

"But, Father Paul ——"

"No, my daughter. His sufferings will shrive him better than I could."

Gerard opened his eyes and gazed about him, at first wondering. Then he started and turned pale.

"Eve!" he ejaculated; but he looked up again, and added: "No! Stella—my Stella!"

"Is he delirious, Father Paul?"

"Not half so much so as he was a week ago!" responded the old man, abruptly.

Later on, Gerard opened his eyes again.

"Yes, you are Stella, my Stella," he said.
"Do you forgive me?"

"Do you repent?" interrupted Father Paul, somewhat roughly.

"I do, father, with all my soul!"

"Then, I can answer for Stella, and for Heaven, my son! You are forgiven!"

"And let us thank the good God," cried Stella, gladly; "for it is He who has brought you back. I knew you would come!"

That night Gerard was indeed delirious.

"Why was I so blind? It was Lilith who was in Eden! The Angel was without!" And so his mind seemed to wander.

Father Paul understood it all, but kept his own counsel, for he was satisfied.

"It is better," he murmured to himself, as he kept faithful watch while Gerard slept, "to have repented than to have never sinned; and there is no teaching so blessed as experience."

And, weeks afterwards, when Stella heard the whole story from Gerard, she

loved him better than before ; while he, for the great wrong he had done her, and for her free forgiveness, wondered at her faith, and learnt to honour her as man should honour wife.





IV. A STRANGE JOURNEY.

WHEN I was a young and comparatively inexperienced hachish-eater, I once called upon a surgeon who lived at Hammersmith and who had promised to show me a new apparatus which he had devised and manufactured for the administration of ether to patients about to undergo severe operations. When he had exhibited and explained his handiwork we went to his *sanctum*, and, while we were smoking together, our conversation fell upon opiates and narcotics in general. I mentioned *cannabis indica*, and he derided it. "It is of no practical value," he said; "I have used it and it has always disappointed me."

"You think, then," I said, "that it produces no narcotic effects?"

"I have never seen any," he returned.

"Well, take some of mine!" I urged, as I offered him a little box of the drug that I had in my pocket.

He begged to be excused. "I am unaccustomed to it—it might incapacitate me," he objected. "But do you take a dose. I should like to see its effects."

And so, to amuse him, although I was more than a mile away from home and could not remain with him for many hours on account of his other engagements, I swallowed a portion.

I only narrate these circumstances because they led up to a curious experience, involving a marvellous realisation of what has been called "levitation."

We dined together: the drug began to exercise its accustomed influence; and I was already in Elysium, when my friend had to leave his house. Having still some slight will-power left, I made up my mind to walk home.

It was a summer evening, and the sun had just set as I shook hands with my host at his door, and descended the steps. No sooner did I reach the pavement of the street than I suddenly lost my normal consciousness, and was apparently liberated from the ordinary shackles of the body.

In a moment I was passing through the warm air at a height varying from four to ten feet from the earth ; and around and below me the people were staring at my strange performance. I paid no heed to them, however, unless, indeed, I scornfully regarded them as inferior beings. To me my method of progress did not seem to be in the slightest degree abnormal. I skated rather than walked, and moved without any effort : and I have a vivid recollection of all my sensations. I was in the Kensington Road : the gas-lamps were being lighted ; and, as I went along, I recognised the faces of many people whom I knew by sight. To one man, who was sitting beside the driver of an omnibus, I nodded, and waved a hand ; and, while I was turning round to do so, I came into contact with another being who, like myself, seemed to be flying through the air. He was a friend of mine, and, for that matter, is so still. The encounter was extraordinary ; but I simply shook hands with him, murmured something to the effect that I was

in a hurry to get home, and sped on as before.

And here I may say, in parenthesis, that, when next I met him, he told me that he had remarked nothing unusual in my demeanour, and had not seen anything peculiarly grotesque in my hasty exclamation: "Sorry I can't stop to talk. You see I am flying home too."

I had made good progress, and was within a few hundred yards of my house when I became aware that I was being pursued. I heard behind me footfalls like the patter which one makes when one throws a handful of shingle upon the smooth surface of a lake; and, spinning round in my course, I confronted one of the strangest arrays that the imagination can conceive. A thousand little sprites of as many different forms were dancing in the air, giggling, smiling, playing all kinds of antics, and ever and anon bursting out into regular Homeric laughter. With one accord they beckoned me to join them, and, when I turned and did so, they flew upon me, like a swarm of bees,

and began caressing and tickling me. I, too, laughed : their deformed little faces were so absurdly comical that I could not help myself. One fellow had a face like that of one of Reynolds's children—a plump, spiritual, dimpled, rosy face that would have been the joy of any mother, only that, unfortunately, instead of a chubby nose, it had a large red, curiously forked, carrot-like proboscis, which it moved at will, just as the octopus moves its tentacles. This fellow particularly attracted my attention. Flying before me, and carrying in his hand a huge eye that gave forth a phosphorescent light, he beckoned me onwards and onwards, until at last we had left his companions far behind in the increasing darkness. By this time I had mounted to a great height in the air, and found myself hovering over an immense and silent sea, in the glassy bosom of which all the stars were brilliantly reflected. No living being save my quaint conductor was visible. I was enjoying the novelty of the situation and the freedom of my position when I noticed

an alteration in the appearance of the sprite. He had become stationary in mid-air, and, as I gazed at him, his fat legs began to lengthen downwards towards the earth. They grew rapidly and became apparently hard and sinewy; yet, without any astonishment, I watched the feet descend lower and lower until they were hidden from my sight by the quiet waters beneath me. Then I looked up: the body and face of my guide had not materially increased in size, but the carrot-like proboscis was growing at a wonderful rate, and shooting out new tentacles with great speed and at very frequent intervals. These tentacles were of a bright orange colour, and, in shape, much like attenuated spoons, the bowls being, however, flattened and covered on both sides with round white spots. I was not frightened; but my curiosity seemed to deprive me of my powers of locomotion, and I also became stationary. When the growth ceased, my guide remained swaying on his miraculous legs, like a bulrush in a wayward breeze, and ducking and twisting

his head as if in search of something. At last one of the wandering tentacles touched me, and in a moment the others were wound around me, and I was tenderly enclosed in a sort of living and pulsating network, which did not squeeze or crush me, but merely retained me as in a covered basket of open work. When I had lost my powers of movement I had for an instant contemplated the horrible possibility of falling through space to the distant sea, but now I felt perfectly safe again. My ability to move was restored, too, though, instead of floating through the air, I trod upon the mass of twisted tentacles. My first impulse was to explore my extraordinary place of refuge. It was ovoid in shape. At one end the extremities of the orange feelers were matted and knotted together into a hard firm mass; but at the other I discovered an immense opening which I immediately recognised as the mouth—by this time greatly increased in size—of my elastic conductor. I entered it, walking boldly over the warm, smooth lower-lip, climbing with some difficulty

over the palisade of white and shining teeth, and jumping down, at some risk of breaking a limb, on to the rough red tongue that heaved like the bosom of the Atlantic after a bad storm. In front, but far away, was the cavernous throat guarded by two imminent throbbing tonsils. I pressed on and passed beneath them into a comparatively narrow downward tunnel that glistened like the interior of a well-kept gun-barrel, and seemed to have no ending and no turning. The rugosities of the way enabled me to descend without much trouble, but at last my feet slipped, and, falling headlong for a short distance, I became doubled up and jammed. Immediately a convulsion began. Evidently efforts were being made to expel me. My capacious guide was palpably choking, and I experienced a fearful uncertainty as to what would happen next. What did happen I do not exactly know. Everything around me seemed to give way and burst with a noise like that which is made by the cracking of a carter's whip. I was free once more, but I was in pieces ; and each

piece took its own way through the air. Then ensued a most remarkable and ludicrous chase. My head floated speedily after an arm or leg, and, having captured the truant, hurried off to capture some other limb, but, in the process, again lost what it had already captured. It was tantalising in the extreme, but very amusing. After a time, however, I grew tired of it and, when I had ceased to make any efforts and had quietly resigned myself to my divided lot, lo, all my fragments of their own accord clustered around me thrust themselves back into their proper places, and made a man of me once more. But what kind of a man? Outwardly, I daresay, I was as I usually am; but I was no longer of real flesh and blood. I was entirely composed of wax. Fortunately my aerial travels had come to an end, for, in my new condition, I felt exceedingly timorous lest I might, by some mischance, break or dent myself. There was no danger of that, however. I was on a bed of cotton-wool, and I should have been perfectly comfortable had not the air

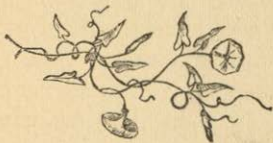
quickly become filled with crowds of fire-flies. First I thought: "They will settle on me and melt me." But a much worse fear soon took possession of me. I thought: "Ah! I am lying in gun-cotton: I know that it is gun-cotton. They will ignite it, and I shall be blown up!" And no sooner had the idea entered my brain than, with a flame and a roar, that which I had feared came to pass, and I disappeared in a cloud of ill-smelling smoke.

The reader may reasonably imagine that these experiences must at the time have been very dreadful. But such was not the case. If I had any terrors, they speedily gave way to a kind of resignation that, I imagine, very nearly resembled the Oriental abandonment to Kismet. Even when I was thus blown up and scattered to the four winds of heaven, the sense of the inconvenience of my position was instantaneously extinguished by the reflection that no man can for ever avoid dissolution. And, moreover, I was immediately compensated for that fleeting period of discomfort. I existed, it is true, no

longer in body ; but I was in a state of complete and absolute bliss that did not permit me to feel my loss. I was in a garden full of pleasant sights and sounds, tended and fed with delicious fruits by yet more delicious sylphs. All the delights of the senses were still mine. There was merely no body to become satiated and weary. And in "keef" I remained, until the almost inevitable sequel brought my experience to a close and aroused me.

I was in my own room and in bed. It was barely eleven o'clock. The lamp on my table was lighted ; and I afterwards found that I had not only lighted it but also trimmed its wick. Since my return I had spoken to members of my family, and they had noticed nothing amiss with me. I had only complained of great sleepiness, and had at once gone upstairs. But, when I awoke, I was so little inclined to turn round and seek for real and rational slumber that I rose and dressed myself, and lost no time in jotting down some notes of my sensations. I discovered that I had undressed myself in my usual way,

had wound up my watch, and had even put my boots outside my door before going to bed. But I know nothing more ; nor can I trace much connection between my dreams and my actions after leaving the house of my friend at Hammersmith.





V. GNOTHI SEAUTON.

WITH one more of my dream-stories I shall bring these fragmentary Confessions to a close. I might, if I so chose, write a great deal more ; but I fear lest any longer chronicle of my grotesque fantasies might weary the reader ; and I feel that such matters as those of which I am treating are possibly, like highly flavoured meats, more easily digested when taken in small quantities than when devoured wholesale.

In writing down this story I have discarded a few extravagant and jarring incidents that in my dreams spoilt the continuity of the development. I have, moreover, tacked together stray pieces, and supplied the material upon which to patch them together. The tale is, nevertheless, the history of a dream or of a succession of dreams, and it contains but little foreign matter.

I.

I was under the full influence of a rather large dose of hachish, when, in imagination, I was transported to the door of a hut that was roughly built at the edge of a dark pine wood. Just without the threshold sat a woman in the prime of life and a beautiful youth, who was evidently her son.

"Arvah," said the woman, whom I may call Rheda, to her companion, "if you love me, love him ; because I love him."

"And that is what I cannot understand," said Arvah, smoothing Rheda's dark hair with his brown hand. "If I were the stronger I could love a weak thing that did not love me ; but if I were the weaker, as you are, I could not love a strong thing that treated me as my father treats you."

"But you do not know," ventured Rheda, half-heartedly.

"Oh ! I know very well," said Arvah, as his dark eyes blazed. "How seldom he is with us now ! We never see him as we used to see him, I call that cruelty.

And I heard you calling for him in your dream last night. You cried out 'Antar,' and seemed to be weeping."

"It must have been your dream, Arvah. Are we not very happy? And do you think that a man can care to be always with a woman?"

"I think, yes!" said Arvah, and a light blush went up into his forehead.

Rheda was gazing at him, and saw it.

"You have learnt something I hoped you had not yet learnt," she said. "Do you love anyone well enough for that, Arvah?"

"I would always gladly be with you," he answered, still blushing. "I could look at you all day and be happy."

Rheda smiled.

"Yes," she said; "but you would rather look at someone else, Arvah. Who is she?"

"I love Damma."

Rheda trembled, and her face became suddenly white as clear marble.

"Damma?" she repeated. "You love Damma?"

"Yes, I love Damma."

"For some time Rheda was silent. Her head dropped upon her hands, and she sat dumb and smitten as if bent by a tempest.

"What do you know of her?" she asked at last, but without looking up again. "Where did you meet her? Where did you speak to her?"

"It was in the spring," answered Arvah, "when the days began to grow hot. I walked in the forest and came upon a white roe, which started from me; and after following it for long in vain I gave up the chase. Close at hand was a place where the cool river widened beneath the beeches into a clear deep pool. The bank was soft with thick moss; and, wearied with the heat, I dived in and swam hither and thither in the pleasant shadows. Then, to dry myself, I climbed into the top of one of the trees and sat in the sunshine, listening to the birds all around me. After I had descended, and as I was wandering slowly along by the river plucking daffodils, I heard a voice behind me

singing softly ; and, turning, saw Damma, who was coming after me from the forest."

Rheda did not raise her head. "What did she say?" she asked.

"She begged for some flowers which I gave her ; and she asked me my name and how old I was. I told her that I was Arvah, and that I was seventeen. 'Then,' she said, smiling, 'I may kiss you, for you are Antar's son !' And she kissed me on the lips."

Once more there was silence. Rheda still sat trembling ; and Arvah wondered what ill his words could have worked.

"Did you see her again, Arvah?" asked Rheda, after a long pause.

"I have seen her thrice since," said Arvah.

"And you love her?"

"Because she is so beautiful. Is she not like the picture of the saint in the chapel? Father Paul says that that saint had been a foolish woman : but Damma is not foolish. I think she is as lovely as one of the angels."

"Arvah, you do not know Damma,"

said Rheda. "Do not speak to her, do not meet her again. Yes, she is like the saint—but—do not speak to her, do not love her, do not think of her. She is our enemy, Arvah!"

"But she loves me," said Arvah, "and she loves my father."

A visible shudder passed through Rheda. When she raised her eyes again to her son, they were red with weeping. "Forget Damma," she said, "or you cannot love me, Arvah."

And Arvah, whom I followed, and with the workings of whose mind I seemed to be quite at home, went out into the forest, wondering why his mother was so moved by what he had told her. He loved Damma, as the boy who is growing to manhood always loves the first beautiful stranger whose lips touch his. The thought of her, he knew not why, sent a thrill through all his veins. In her presence he felt happy. In her absence he longed for her. What evil could there be in Damma?

I returned to Rheda who knew more

than she dared to tell her son. Antar, whom she had loved with all her being from the day, eighteen years before, when as an innocent maiden she had given herself to him, loved her no more ; and instead he loved Damma. And now, was she who had robbed spouse to rob mother as well ? Was Arvah also to be taken from that warm heart which had no other treasure save its memory of dead days of joy ?

Rheda sat, still weeping, until the sunset ; and then through her tears watched the glorious colour of the western sky as the day sank to its rest, and the chill breath of night came bending the musical tops of the pines. The world was then not so desert as her heart, whence the light of the one man's love had departed to shine elsewhere.

And Antar, whom even to look upon would have been bliss to her, came not. Where was he, and with whom ? She dared not trust herself to guess the truth. He was hunting, or he was on his way back from fishing in some distant stream ;

but he was not with Damma. Nay, rather had he been waylaid and left wounded, or a rock from some toppling precipice had fallen upon his road and crushed him ; but he was not with Damma. A true woman's heart will not believe the worst unfaithfulness, even in the face of proof.

Then, as night drew on and settled itself over the earth, Arvah returned tired from his wanderings, and went silently to his rest ; for he did not see the dim form of Rheda still sitting in the black shadow, and now watching the pale moon which, to all hearts that are heavy and all brains that are tortured, seems to bring some pleasant, though vague message of tenderness. Soon nature hushed herself to sleep, and only the rebels of the night kept up their murmurings and chatter. The sourvoiced crake still watched amid the hoarded gold of the moonlit corn ; and the screech-owl, deep in its midnight studies, uttered occasional comments from his ivy work-room. Yet, save these and

Rheda, all that was not evil slept. But far down in the swamp the light-o'-love will-o'-wisps flitted, and the bats circled around them, dazzled by their misleading brilliancy ; and the weird mists of miasma rose up to stalk about the land and poison men and women while they slept. Rheda saw these white-robed ghosts ascending into the clear air, and at last, with a shudder, gave up the hope which she had cherished, and went miserable to her couch.

Yet she did not hate Antar, the hero of her maidenhood. She would have welcomed him again to her arms with all the utter love and confidence of her first happy days with him. He was still her all ; and, if he came not, her life and joy were dead. Not even in her dreams did she suffer herself to believe the truth. Her thoughts were ever of him ; her one longing was that he should once again wind her to him in his strong embrace, and kiss her with his old passionate love. Had he come she would have asked him no questions. Her heart and her arms

were open and they remained open : but only the chilling night wind crept into the great solitude of her bosom, and the cruel disappointment of waking mocked her vain dreams of revived happiness.

And Arvah heard her through the night calling for Antar.

2.

Far away from Rheda and her son, across the shadowy forest and the silvered river, there was a sound of revelry and music. Within a court, open towards the top to the balmy air, and hung on all sides with striped silks and gorgeous tapestries, Damma gave a feast ; and at her side, gazing into her liquid eyes or watching every mood of her humour, was Antar. His look was full of love, such as years before he had given to Rheda, the pure maiden whom with all promises he had taken into his keeping for good report and ill. But Damma was young, and Rheda was growing old now. Not that Rheda was no longer beautiful : rather had she grown more beautiful

with the lapse of years. Yet Damma was new to Antar, and she differed in all things from his old love. Her kisses were not the same; her voice seemed sweeter; her ways had greater charm; and she had arts which Rheda never had, and which made Antar's throat swell and his heart beat when he gazed upon her. True he had not known her for long. He had only met her a few days before her first encounter with Arvah on the banks of the river; but at that moment he had fallen before her wonderful beauty, heedless of whether he ranked alone in her love or not. And she, when she saw young Arvah, fresh from the river and ruddy with the glow of health and action, hesitated, although Antar knew it not, and then, stung by the novel sweetness of the boy's soft kiss, gave her heart to him, and promised herself that some day he should be hers, when Arvar should be grown and Antar should have wearied her. And thus, although she revelled with Antar for a season, she loved Arvah and waited for his manhood. And Antar,

if he thought at all, believed that he was supreme.

Damma was queen of the feast, and Antar sat at her right hand, the only guest ; for although many others were present, they were only there for his amusement. There were music and song between every sumptuous course ; but the best entertainment was reserved until the tables were cleared and borne away by strong hands. Then Damma and her lover withdrew to two high seats at one end of the court, and when the rest had clustered in a picturesque group at their feet, a great singer entered and sang to them with mellifluous voice a voluptuous song of love. He was followed by a young man and a beauteous maiden who, while bewitching music was softly played behind a heavy curtain, acted together a scene which caused Antar to often turn his passionate eyes in sympathy upon the lovely being beside him, and to press her hand which lay the while in his. The youth was a lover pleading, at first in vain, for a requital of his passion, the

maiden with arch glances and tempting gestures leading him insensibly on, yet giving him but scant hope. She fled that he might follow ; she taunted and pouted and derided that she might find pleasure in his discomfiture ; she put herself in his power only to repulse him rudely when he attempted to presume upon his advantage. But at last, when in despair he drew a dagger and threatened to plunge it into his heart if she would not have pity upon him and give him the only happiness he longed for, she burst into tears, and bitterly reproaching herself, threw herself without conditions into his arms. Next came a choir of youths and damsels, who sang a long hymn in praise of love ; and, finally, the stronger lights were veiled, some delicious spices were burnt in two huge bronze vases which stood before Antar and Damma, and, amid the smoke of the incense, four perfectly-formed girls, clad in light and flowing garments, and decked with rare flowers, were seen dancing with bared feet to the renewed strains of the hidden music Their

movements were as graceful as those of the grey wreaths that rose slowly upwards from the burning spices; and they seemed rather like the fair creatures of a summer night's dream than human beings. Their long silky hair waved around their white shoulders; their eyes sparkled, even in the gloom, with excitement and passion; and their lithe limbs swayed and turned with a grace so wondrous that they might have been moved by a wanton breeze. And when they had danced and with all the others had departed, Antar and Damma walked upon the cool marble terrace in the moonlight without, and gave themselves up to communings of love.

She was deceiving him. She was trying to imagine that the brown, sinewy arm that was around her was the fairer arm of her boy lover, Arvah, grown to manhood, and thinking of her as passionately as in her wildest dreams she thought of him. And Antar was deceiving her. She thought that he was all hers, even although she was not all his; but when

he gazed up into the face of the moon he could not, even in his new delirium, forget the old days when he had walked at eve with another and a purer. His memory awoke, and, though he did not suffer it to pierce his heart, it attacked him sorely and persistently, and prevented him from enjoying his imagined happiness. No one can love twice who has loved once. In the second passion there must always be something lacking; and the heart cannot give love, any more than the hand can give gold, without having the less to give in the future. One love for each life is enough; and one great happiness, and one great pain. Therefore, man should love his best at first, for the full and perfect opportunity never returns: and afterwards it may perchance be that only strange and foreign passions catch the appetite. As for the one great pain, it is either the death of what we love, or the other death which lays its cold finger on our hearts and tells us that thenceforth our opportunity of love has departed.

Thus night grew older, and while Antar and Damma sank into each other's arms, Arvah still heard Rheda calling through her tears, and calling in vain.

3

The white ghosts of the night did not hasten away with the darkness when next morning it slowly went down in the cold west. They remained clinging to the shadows at the edge of the forest, and hovering over the dull river that ran as lead, and seemed to wait for the sun to melt it and let it ripple and laugh like silver and gold in its bed.

Antar came forth weary, and strode through the mist to the water, into which, chill and cheerless though it was, he flung himself. When he regained the bank he shivered, for the spectres of the night had taken possession of his heart, and the world was unhomely and strange to him. Had he been with Rheda, things had been otherwise, for she was still his home and his sanctuary; but he did not know it. He only felt the vague longing of dis-

satisfaction—the terrible depression that comes of worse than wasted hours.

Antar had walked but a few paces from the river when he was accosted by an old greybeard who, leaning upon a rough staff and bowed almost double by the weight of his years, begged whiningly for alms. In a careless mood Antar threw the man a piece of gold, and would have moved rapidly away but that he was detained by the beggar, who, instead of thanking him, said, "You must be rich if you can give so much for so little."

"Rich!" repeated Antar, "I am not rich; and do you think that even riches make happiness?"

"Ah! But I could be rich if I were like you, with those thews and muscles; and with this staff of mine." And the old man's eyes glistened with cupidity.

"What do you mean?" inquired Antar, who now halted.

"Up in the mountain," said the greybeard, "there is a cavern in which a miser has hoarded his wealth. Oh! there are jars of gold, and jars of jewels. But, look

you, he keeps guard up there ; and he is as strong as you are. I think that he sleeps with one eye open. I have tried to surprise him, but in vain. Now, if only I were like you, with those thews and muscles, I would not be poor."

"Who is the man?" demanded Antar.

"Ha ! ha !" laughed the beggar. "If I were to tell you that, I should tell you all. You are too hasty. But, then, you do not want his riches." And he seemed to be about to depart.

"Stay !" cried Antar, after a pause ; and then he was silent again.

"See you !" said the old man, his eyes sparkling once more beneath his shaggy brows as he looked up. "Suppose that you lend me those thews and muscles of yours. I will repay you with half of those riches. What do you say?"

"What do you want?" asked Antar in a low voice.

"Let us go and take his gold," whispered the beggar ; "and if he resists, well, there are those thews and muscles of yours,

and here is my staff. Oh ! there are jars of jewels up there."

Antar wondered whether the old man were raving ; but the evil spell of wasted hours was still upon him, and he said : " I will go. If there be gold and jewels, you shall have half."

Without more words the two men, side by side, walked slowly up the mountain in the white mist of the sunless morning, the old beggar labouring and stumbling and groaning on his way, and Antar assisting him where the ground was rough and broken. And afar off, in the mind of each, shone the fatal glitter of gold, beckoning onwards ; for age has an un-failing eyesight for wealth, even after it can no longer see the brightness of a bird's wing, or the face of love, or the pure colouring of a flower ; and although a heart be sick of endearments and weary with passion, it can never, while it beats, think of riches without beating faster, and throbbing with all the novelty of desire.

Higher and higher they climbed over a

rock-strewn ascent, now carefully stepping from one huge and ill-balanced boulder to another ; now advancing timorously along a narrow path with a wall of cliff on one side and an unfathomable precipice on the other ; and now using hands as well as feet for their support at some dangerous turn. Deeper grew the cloudy valley below them, clearer grew the sky above, and ever nearer frowned the unvisited bare peaks, around which vultures circled as if in anger at the invasion of their desolate dominions.

The old man rested many times on the way ; but at last, after more than usual exertions, he halted, almost breathless, and gasped, " It is here ! "

" I see no cave," said Antar.

The greybeard, leaning heavily on his staff, pointed to a rough slab of mossy stone that rested, as if by accident, against a wall of apparently solid rock, and said : " Lift it away. That is his door. There is the cave."

Antar looked around him, but there was no living being save his companion within

sight, and silence reigned on the mountain.

"Where is he?" he whispered. "Where is the master of the cave?"

"Listen!" said the old man; but Antar listened in vain, and then, emboldened, put his hands upon the stone and slowly began to move it from its place. When he had shifted it a little, and seen that it covered a black opening in the rock, he desisted for an instant and listened again; but no sound came from within, and he went on with his work, the beggar meanwhile looking on at him in silence, but with sparkling eyes. In a short time the opening was entirely uncovered, and then the old man made a greedy movement to enter the cavern.

"Wait!" cried Antar, in a hushed voice. "What have you done? Nothing! And yet you want the half. No! It must be all mine, save what I choose to give you."

A flush of anger passed across the beggar's withered face.

I showed you the way," he said; "is

that nothing? There was a bargain, you know. Half was to be mine."

Antar reflected. Then he drew back. "Very well," he said. "Go in first. If he is there it is but fair that you should be the first to meet him." And he laughed sneeringly; but the old man, instead of heeding, crept in eagerly, and disappeared in the darkness. Soon Antar heard his feeble voice calling him to follow, and he also entered.

The beggar had already provided himself with a light, and was setting fire to a pine-torch with which he had come provided. By its smoky glare Antar saw that they were standing in a long and lofty gallery, from the dim roof of which hung fantastic stalactites, that glistened like gems. The old man cautiously made his way inwards, making sure with his staff of his footing; and soon disappeared in a recess. Antar hurried after him, and found his guide speechless before the wealth and jewels that lay piled upon the stone floor of the cavern. Several large earthenware jars stood heaped to

their brims with gold ; and in a huge open iron-bound chest were as many gems of all colours and sizes as a man could carry.

“Quick !” cried the old man, as soon as he recovered himself ; and he threw himself upon the coffer. “Quick ! Help yourself ! He is not here, but he will return. Quick !”

But, as he spoke, the spoilers heard the dull noise of rapidly approaching feet ; and, ere they could hide themselves, a loud voice echoed through the cavern in anger and menace.

“Give me your staff,” said Antar, as he seized it and rudely flung the beggar aside ; and then he strode to the entrance of the recess, while the old man, trembling behind him, held the flickering torch aloft.

In a moment a stalwart form came into the uncertain light, and Antar, springing forward, dealt the new-comer a terrible blow. There was a brief struggle in the gloom. Antar was dashed backwards upon the beggar, extinguishing the pine-

torch; a few short mad words followed; then there was a weary groan, and all was silent.

It was some time ere the old man was able to rekindle the light; and, when once more the pine torch was held aloft, its rays fell upon the prostrate bodies of Antar and the master of the cavern. The former, who had been only stunned, speedily came to himself; and, while he was recovering, the beggar, having fixed his torch in one of the jars of gold, began hastily to fill his rags with jewels.

Antar, seated upon the ground, watched him, at first half-dreamily; but, as full consciousness returned, he staggered to his feet,

"Not so fast!" he said; "I have been nearly killed, and you have done nothing. The first choice is mine."

Yet still the old man continued to fill his rags as though he heard not. His eyes glistened with greed and covetousness, and his grisly hands seemed not large enough to clutch the wealth he saw before him. Antar, with an angry gesture, went

towards him. "Put them down, I say. They are mine," he cried. "Put them down." But his head swam, and he had to support himself against the wall, for he had been sorely hurt in the struggle with the master of the cavern. When a second time his senses came to him again, the torch was burning in the jar as before, but the old man had gone.

Antar sprang up with a cry, and rushed to the entrance of the cave.

It was closed. The beggar had by some means replaced the stone, and must have wedged it fast, for Antar could not move it. For some time he strove in vain to push it outwards; but, finding that it did not stir, he returned to the recess, hoping to discover there some instrument that would help him to regain his freedom and enjoy the treasure.

In the inner chamber the torch showed him that only a few jewels remained in the chest. Antar turned away with a bitter curse, and, as he did so, his eye fell upon the body of the master of the cavern. It lay face downwards as it had fallen

after a second dreadful blow that had been dealt it in the dark ; and, with a kind of vague expectation that it might have some weapon upon it, Antar turned it over.

Then he started backwards, and buried his face in his trembling hands.

Those pale, dead lips, from between which the blood was slowly trickling, were the lips of Antar's younger brother, Gorro ; Gorro whom as a boy he had played with and fondled ; Gorro whom as a man he had quarrelled with ; Gorro whom now he had slain !

With a great cry of terror Antar rushed wildly from the recess into the long, vaulted gallery without ; nor did he stay till in his blind and despairing madness he fell headlong against the cold, hard rock, and sank bleeding and senseless to the earth.

And in the treasure-cave the torch burnt low, and fluttered, and went out, leaving the dead alone in the silence and the darkness. And far away Rheda sat weeping and waiting for Antar, who returned not. The coldness of death was

at her heart, but death would not deliver her.

Yes, there may be bitterer things than death itself, and there are.

4.

The sharp rock had branded Antar's brow as with the brand of Cain ; and, when the stunned man once more came to himself, a strange and misty vision met his gaze. As though pictured in the darkness, he saw again the scene of the previous night's revelry and music. The striped hangings and gorgeous tapestries were there, and Damma was there, too ; but at her side, instead of himself, was a youthful figure that seemed curiously familiar to Antar. The light curls of a boyish head wantoned on Damma's shoulder, and her red lips were raining passionate kisses upon the face of Arvah !

With a jealous cry Antar sprang up, and sought to tear away the vision ; but it eluded him ; and, even as he gazed, he heard out of the darkness Damma's well-known voice confessing to her boy-love

the truth which the wretched father, in his blindness, had never suspected. He knew at last that Damma had ceased to love him, and that she had given all her passion and all herself to his son.

As if spell-bound, he watched the disenchanted picture. It was too real to be incredible. He felt that it was more than a dream, and in his agony of madness he buried his feverish head in his hands. But suddenly a crash seemed to shake the cavern, and Antar perforce looked up again. The vision had changed. Damma, dead and crushed, was lying prone upon the earth, and above her, horror-struck, stood Arvah, staring fearfully skyward, whence had come the bolt that had smitten his love in its first unholy bliss of delirious joy.

Again Antar rushed wildly away. In the far distance he saw a light, and he made towards it. It streamed feebly from an opening in the rock far above his head; but, after some climbing he reached it, and looked through into a small chamber which, to his joy, seemed to be the living-place of a human being.

He crept in stealthily. Upon the floor lay the skins of beasts. He coiled his weary body upon them and slept.

When he awoke he found that he was not alone.

Crouched upon some other skins in a dusky corner lay a figure, the outlines of which he could at first barely distinguish in the scant light that came from the old lamp hanging from the roof of the squalid cave. But at last the figure moved; and Antar trembled, for it rose and came towards him, and he then saw plainly that it was the form of a wizzened and hideous hag.

"So," she exclaimed, smiling and showing her toothless gums, "you have come. I have long been waiting for you."

"You?" cried Antar, recoiling. "You?"

"Yes; we will live and love together now for ever. Do you not know me? Do you not recognise me? And yet you know me well. Come," and she strove to embrace him with her thin, bony arms.

"Never!" exclaimed Antar. "I will leave you."

"Ha! ha!" she laughed; "you cannot leave me. And you used not to repulse me. Think better of it. Come!"

"I do not know you!" he cried, with loathing.

But she sprang upon him, and he, weak and weary and faint, could not for long resist her.

"Mine for ever!" she murmured, in her harsh voice, as she placed her dry lips to his.

"And who are you?" gasped Antar, pale and wretched and powerless to escape.

"Ha! ha! you ought to know me, Antar. You used to love me pretty well, I think. And now you can never leave me. Day and night you shall lie in my arms, and kiss me."

"But who are you?" he insisted.

"I am Yourself, your foul, hideous Self!" she shrieked into his ear.

And Antar swooned.

5.

"Antar is dead!" groaned Rheda.

I had returned to her. At her side

was a venerable man whom I had seen in other dreams of mine.

"Even so," he said, kindly. "Yet still you have something to be thankful for. Damma, too, is dead: the lightning has slain her."

"But Antar, my husband!" cried Rheda; "what has the good God left me?"

"Has he not left you Arvah?" quoth Father Paul.

And Rheda looked up through her tears, and was comforted.

* * * * *

Such is hachish, and such are some of the images which it paints before the brain of its devotee. I have found it to be a nepenthes, a sweet bringer of delicious oblivion, and a generous parent of delightful dreams. I have indulged in it a good deal, but not to excess; and I hope to enjoy its effects many times again. And I can conscientiously say that, so far as I know, I am not one whit the worse for my experiences with this wonderful drug. People usually take me to be somewhat

younger than I am. No one, I am perfectly certain, would from my appearance suspect me of being a hachish eater, or of using any more potent narcotic than tobacco-smoke, which, by the way, I do use every day and all day ; and, in fine, I have yet to learn that a moderate and discreet employment of my favourite dream-compeller is, to even the slightest degree, injurious to a person of ordinarily good constitution. Why, therefore, should I not continue, in leisure hours, to voyage away from my body into the misty land whither most people only penetrate after they have over-eaten themselves ?

“ But it will eventually weaken your brain,” says that benevolent old gentleman, Dr. Omnibus.

Dr. Omnibus, with all my respects, is a fool.

It is he who says : “ Don’t drink beer—it is adulterated. Don’t drink spirits—they destroy the coats of the stomach. Don’t drink tea or coffee—it ruins the digestion and deadens the nerves. And, above all, don’t drink water—it is poisonous.”

You reader, and I, have heard him say all this ; and, in similar strains, he makes onslaughts on tobacco, on corsets, on lobster salads, and on a great many other good and indifferent things. Do you heed him? Of course not. Neither do I. But we all know that the old gentleman must have something to prattle about.

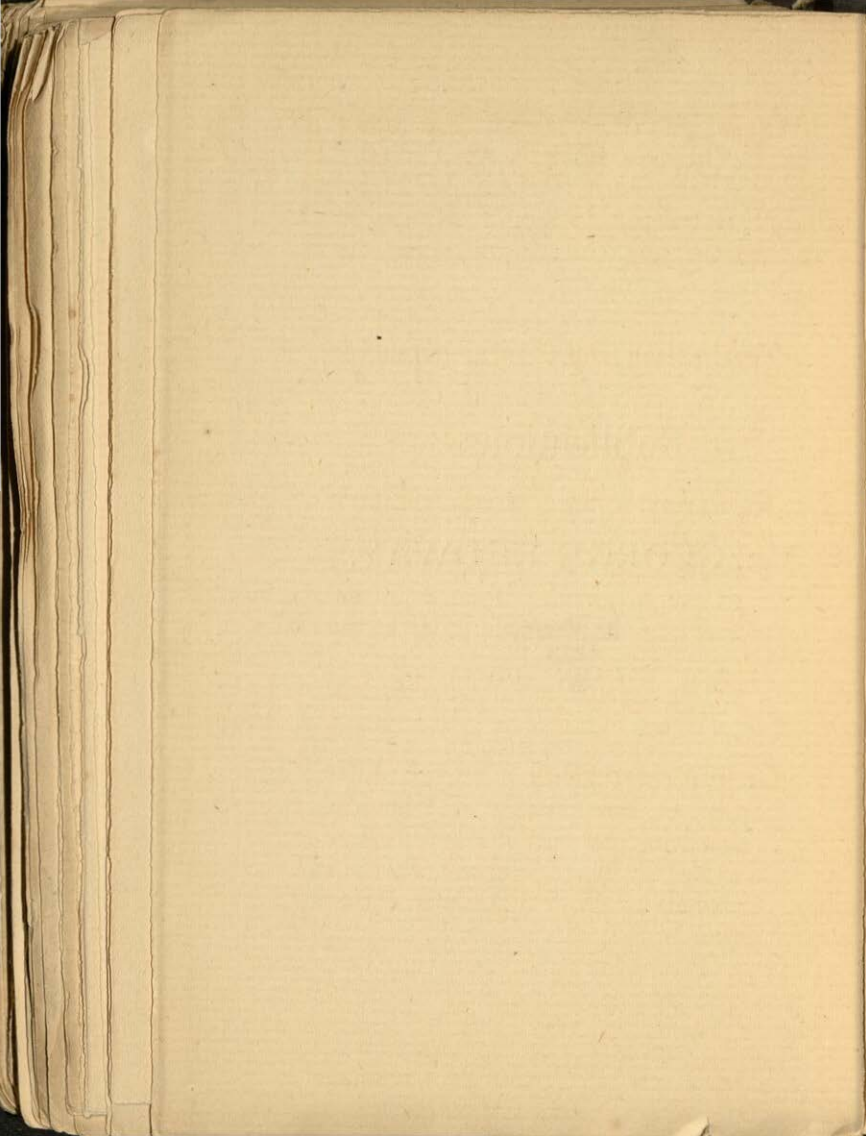


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